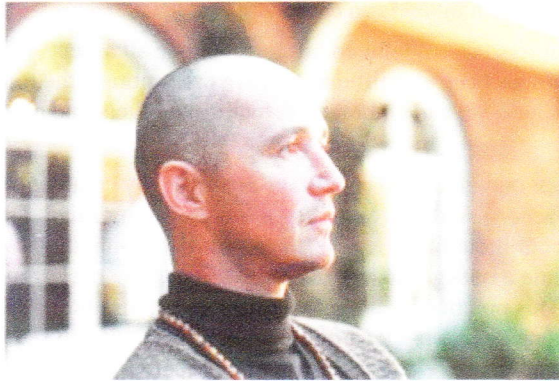


# HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER "NEWS"

57 Hartford Street -- Phone: 863-2507 -- Email: [hszc108@yahoo.com](mailto:hszc108@yahoo.com) -- Website: [www.hszc.org](http://www.hszc.org) -- Sept, 2007



Excerpts: Issan Dorsey-sensei Dharma Talk on *Death*  
Printed HSZC Newsletter, Fall 1990

The encounter with death ... begins at birth. Not when you are actually sick and dying. So Baker-roshi, my teacher, had me speaking about the fact that it should be our practice to keep in front of us, all the time, "I certainly am going to die."

When I was listening to his lectures, I always said, "Oh, I understand that, I know that." Because I had been so close to death many times in my life. Also I had already begun some minimal work with people with AIDS. This is before living at Hartford Street Zen Center. In my mind, I felt I understood what that meant, "I certainly am going to die."

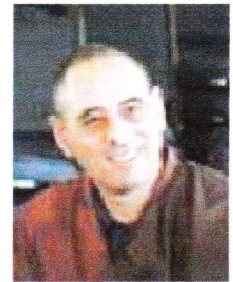
But, lo and behold, when I had my HIV test in Sante Fe, and it was positive, the relationship [chuckling] with, "I certainly am going to die," changed. Radically. And then all along the way. You know, the first time I became sick ... after I went through those initial changes, and came back to San Francisco, I felt quite healthy, and had a lot of energy. I was helping to establish more the practice place at Hartford Street Zen Center. Giving classes and lectures, and thinking about how we might involve ourselves with the AIDS epidemic.

I had been given permission, actually instructed by my teacher, to speak to people about my reactions and feelings about AIDS. A sign on the wall of the Sante Fe AIDS Services office said, "One must live as if it would be forever, and as if one might die each moment." Always both at once. It's too bad it took such an epidemic for us to begin to think that way. That we have not only the opportunity but the responsibility to spend time with people who are dying.

To keep in front of you, "I certainly am going to die." All the time. We forget. 'Cause even now, I have quite a few healthy days in a row, my whole attitude changes, until all of a sudden I get another little CKKCH! [makes a jabbing motion] saying, "Hey, you certainly are going to die."  
(Photo: Unknown Source, HSZC Archives)

IN CONVERSATION:  
DAVID SCHNEIDER AND NORMAN FISCHER

"Drag, Dharma, and the Dragon:  
25 Years of Zen in the Castro"



Honoring Issan Dorsey and  
25 years of Hartford Street Zen Center

On Saturday, the 8th of September, Hartford Street Zen Center is holding its first-ever community-wide fundraiser in celebration of its 25th anniversary. The special program will feature a conversation between two Buddhist luminaries and authors, **David Schneider** and **Norman Fischer**, "Drag, Dharma, and the Dragon: 25 Years of Zen in the Castro." The

event will take place on **Saturday, September 8th at 8 p.m.**, at Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Church, 100 Diamond Street, San Francisco. Admission is \$25, and the Buddhist community and general public are invited to attend. The program is followed by tea and cookies. A \$150 sponsorship includes a pre-event dinner with the celebrated authors at 5:30 p.m. at Hartford Street Zen Center, 57 Hartford Street. All proceeds benefit Hartford Street Zen Center. Call 415-431-2665 or email [mimimanning@earthlink.net](mailto:mimimanning@earthlink.net) for reservations and/or further information. Thank you.



Excerpts: Issan Dorsey-sensei Dharma Talk on *Breath*  
Printed HSZC Newsletter, Winter 1988

I was talking with my teacher about the phrase, "coming to reside in your breath-mind," and working with that phrase.

We have to be willing to explore and experiment. First we have to have a sense of humor and a willingness to explore and experiment with our lives and our uncomfortableness. We know we can sit for a few minutes, or even for a few days, but at some point it gets pretty uncomfortable; and it's uncomfortable not to invite our thoughts to tea, and to reside in our breath-mind. "Don't invite your thoughts to tea" is an expression of Suzuki-roshi's which I've always found useful.

Sometimes when I'm talking about uncomfortableness, I talk about the five fears. One of the five fears is the fear of unusual states of mind. How do we come to have appreciation and respect for this fear and not just some resistance? So that we can enter our fear, allowing these new areas of uncomfortableness.

When we can enter each of these new spaces, we can begin to look at truthfulness. The one quality we should strive for is truthfulness. (Continued on back page)



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## MORNING (Monday-Friday)

5:30am-6:10 Zazen - Sitting Meditation  
6:10am-6:20 Kinhin - Walking Meditation  
6:20am-7:00 Zazen  
7:00am-7:20 Chanting (Service)  
7:20am-7:35 Soji - Temple Cleaning

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## EVENING (Monday-Friday)

6:00pm-6:40 Zazen  
6:40pm-6:50 Chanting

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## SATURDAY MORNING

6:30am-7:15 Zazen  
7:15am-7:35 Chanting  
7:35am-7:55 Soji  
[BREAK]  
9:10am-9:50 Zazen  
10:00am-11:00 Dharma Talk followed by tea/cookies.

SUNDAYS and HOLIDAYS - Closed

## RETREATS and INSTRUCTION:

- \* 1-day retreats (1st Saturdays of the month)
- \* Zazen instruction (brief form) 8:30am (2nd/4th Saturdays) and long form, 1pm, Third Saturdays with pre-registration.

## "ISSAN VIGNETTES"

from fall 1999 HSZC newsletter

### On Coming and Going by George Gayuski.

One day a woman came by HSZC, no one had seen her before. She sat zazen and stayed for service. After, as she was leaving, Issan called out from the living room "GOOD BYE. Thank you for coming! ... You DID come, didn't you?" She was speechless as she went out the door.

from spring 1999 HSZC newsletter

### The Best Will be Good Enough by George Gayuski

One night Issan and a few friends went out for dinner at an upscale Italian restaurant in the Mission District. Everyone was poring over their menus while Issan, his reading glasses pitched on the end of his nose, carefully and taking his time, read over the oversized wine list. When the wine steward was at hand to take the order, Issan named the wine he had chosen. The steward was surprised and remarked, "Sir, that's our best wine!" Issan handed the wine list to the steward in one long smooth move and said, "Well, the best will be good enough."

from spring 2000 HSZC newsletter

### Carrots by George Gayuski

Issan was working in the kitchen (don't remember if it was Page Street or Tassajara, but seem to recall the story was at Tassajara) and was weary of the vegetarian and dietary fanaticism going on at Zen Center at the time. (Issan loved to brag about eating hamburgers out on Saturday nights.) One student was about to take a knife to a whole carrot and Issan hollered: "WAIT!!! Are you SURE that carrot is dead?"

**THANKS** to Revs. Mark Lancaster and Tova Green for their Dharma talks.

SEPTEMBER DATES TO REMEMBER  
Sept 3 - Zendo Closed - Labor Day Holiday

(Continued from front - Issan on *Breath*)

Truthfulness takes a total commitment to see all aspects of ourselves and our unskillfulness. If we can embrace the totality of ourselves, we can embrace the totality of others and of the world.

We teach ourselves and encourage ourselves by creating this space [zendo] so that we can begin looking at our mind. Don't invite your thoughts to tea. Where is our breath-mind? How do you create a background mind? Now I say create background mind. This practice is simple: count your breaths and don't invite your thoughts to tea. Don't make your mind blank, but rather, have some blank relationship with the thoughts. Begin to see the space behind and around the thoughts and shift the seat of your identity out of your thoughts and reside in your breath-mind.

This all ties in with how we use this space, this laboratory. We should have a willingness to explore with our lives and this is our laboratory, right here - how we use the zendo and how we use what happens outside the zendo. Mindfulness is not a part-time job.

## "More Than Our Numbers" by Allen Balderson

A few days ago a member of our HIV zazen group gave us his medical update. He's doing well; started on new meds. He feels he has more energy. But, he's also dealing with the anxiety and fear of what might happen next. How will he do on this new regime? What will his "numbers" be like?

Those damn, nagging numbers that he and other people with HIV confront every day. How many T-cells do you have? If they just dropped below 200, you have just gone from HIV to AIDS. Is your viral load undetectable? What is the percentage of CD4s? Where do your CD8s stand? Yes, a relatively simple blood draw will not only supply you with those numbers and many more, but could have an impact on how to proceed with your daily life before your arm is once again pricked.

When your numbers are not what the standards say they "should be", fear could raise its ugly head, take over rational thought and lead you to looking obsessively for signs of deteriorating health.

Fortunately, our brains eventually come back to a revealing reality - while HIV numbers can be indicators for clinicians, they do not define us.

There are many variables contributing to one's health. There are hereditary factors; we have different metabolisms. Many of us are leading healthier life styles to benefit the mind and the body. Some of us meditate, do yoga, get acupuncture, change diets, volunteer, get massages, take Chinese herbs, do aerobics and weight training. Some work at less stressful jobs. All of these are not only empowering but can contribute to living longer and achieving a state of balance.

And while we diligently continue to take our meds and find our way through the haze of our HIV worlds, we are still men and women with hearts, souls and minds; with lives to be lived, and people to love. We attempt to live in the now, moment by moment, and know that life is indeed a process. We can attain a sense of well-being, and at times an inner peace that comes from not worrying about what happened yesterday or fretting over tomorrow. And maybe along the way, we just might achieve great clarity we didn't think possible.

I'm going to go meditate right now and do some counting. Those numbers I can rely on.



# Hartford Street Drag

.... the Girls and Fluffer ....

We love you ISSAN!



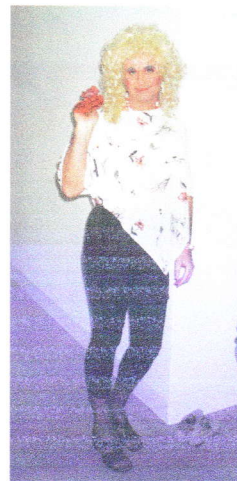
Carol



Teal



Anonymous and Diana



Beverly



Fluffer



Lime and Teal



Patricia



Pam



Beverly



Bambi



Ms. P.



Bambi

WHO are these lovelies? Allen Balderson Paul Lee  
Jeff Thomas Bob Craig John Walmsley Bruce Smith  
Jim Shalkham and friend, Craig.



## DRAG, DHARMA, AND THE DRAGON: 25 YEARS OF ZEN IN THE CASTRO



The Hartford Street Zen Center is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a special program featuring a conversation between two Buddhist luminaries and authors, David Schneider and Norman Fischer, **"Drag, Dharma, and the Dragon: 25 Years of Zen in the Castro."** The event will take place on Saturday, September 8 at 8 pm, at Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Church, 100 Diamond Street, San Francisco. Admission is \$25, and the Buddhist community and general public are invited to attend. Program followed by tea and cookies. A \$150 sponsorship includes a pre-event dinner with the authors at 5:30 p.m. at Hartford Street Zen Center, 57 Hartford Street. All proceeds benefit Hartford Street Zen Center (HSZC). Visit their website at [www.hszc.org](http://www.hszc.org) or call 415-431-2665 or email [mimimanning@earthlink.net](mailto:mimimanning@earthlink.net) for reservations and further information.



**David Schneider** is the author of *Street Zen* (1993, 2000), a biography of Issan Dorsey, chronicling his journey from junked-up drag queen to Zen master and founder of Hartford Street Zen Center and Maitri Hospice. *Street Zen* won several prizes, including "Best Buddhist Book of the Year" in 1993. In 1994 he co-edited a collection of Zen stories, titled *Essential Zen*. Schneider began to practice Zen meditation with a local group at Reed College in Portland in the 1970s and in 1977 received ordination at the San Francisco Zen Center. He was the first head monk of HSZC. Following his early training in the Soto Zen tradition of Buddhism, he was formally accepted by Trungpa Rinpoche as a student in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In 1995, Schneider was appointed the director of Shambhala Europe, a position he held until 2003. Schneider now works for Vajradhatu Publications Europe and continues to pursue writing and calligraphy projects. He is currently writing a biography of Beat poet and former abbot of HSZC, Zenshin Philip Whalen.



**Norman Fischer** is a poet and Zen Buddhist priest. For many years he has taught at the San Francisco Zen Center, the oldest and largest of the new Buddhist organizations in the West, where he served as co-abbot from 1995 to 2000. He is presently a Senior Dharma Teacher there as well as the founder and spiritual director of the [Everyday Zen Foundation](http://www.everydayzen.org), an organization dedicated to adapting Zen Buddhist teachings to Western culture. Fischer's poetry is noted for its humor, off-beat spiritual insight, and variety. His more recent poetry books include *I Was Blown Back* (2005) and *Slowly But Dearly* (2002). His latest Dharma book is *Taking Our Places*, published by Harper San Francisco in 2003. Forthcoming from Simon and Schuster in summer of 2008 is *Sailing Home: the Spiritual Odyssey*.